
HISTORICAL SKETCH

- OF -

NORTH AND SOUTH DAKOTA

-BY-

WILLIAM MAXWELL BLACKBURN, D. D., LL. D.

1893

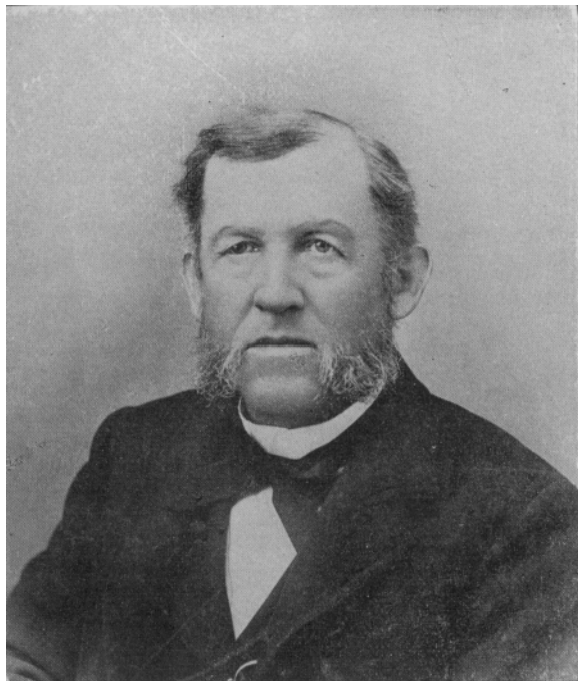
WITH EDITORIAL NOTES

-BY-

DR. DE LORME W. ROBINSON
AND AN APPRECIATION OF DR. BLACKBURN
BY THOMAS LAWRENCE RIGGS

NOTE BY THE SECRETARY

The persistent effort put forth by Dr. Blackburn, singlehanded, to carry on the work of a state historical society during ten years of the state's history, as well as the fact that he left unpublished an outline history of the Dakotas, makes it, in the estimation of the executive committee, highly proper in this, the first volume of the collections of Dakota history, that his work be recognized by the publication of the subjoined papers ; not more, however, to do honor to his memory than for their intrinsic historical worth. Few American historians have written with a broader view, better equipment, or greater honesty.



William Maxwell Blackburn, D. D., LL. D.

WILLIAM MAXWELL BLACKBURN, D. D., LL. D.'
BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE SOCIETY

Dr. Blackburn was born near Carlisle, Indiana, December 30, 1828; graduated from Hanover College in 1850 and took his theological course at Princeton. After seventeen years in the pastorate, for thirteen years he occupied the chair of Biblical and ecclesiastical history in the Theological Seminary of the Northwest-now McCormick Theological Seminary, at Chicago. A short term of three years in the pastorate at Cincinnati intervening, he was president of the University of North Dakota for one year, and in 1885 took charge of the Presbyterian Synodical College at Pierre, South Dakota, continuing there till the time of his death, December 29, 1898, rounding out a fruitful life of seventy years. He received from Princeton the honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity and from Wooster University that of Doctor of Laws.

The ancestors of Dr. Blackburn were of Scotch-Irish blood. Tradition says that the family was of those who, under the persecutions of the time of Mary Stuart, left Scotland and joined the Huguenots in France in their struggle for religious liberty -a struggle seemingly disastrous in outcome, but vindicated in history as triumphantly glorious. Escaping from their pursuers, it is said that they crossed the English Channel in an open boat, and, about the time of the massacre of St. Bartholomew, returned to Scotland. Falling under the influences that were making for the settlement of the New World they came to America and settled in eastern Pennsylvania, members of the Pennsylvania colony. From there they extended their borders south and west into Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee and beyond. The famous pulpit orator, Dr. Gideon Blackburn, of Georgia, belonged to the Virginia branch, and from Kentucky came Governor Luke Blackburn and United States Senator Joseph Blackburn. The

grandfather of William Maxwell Blackburn, William, had his home in Kentucky, but, being opposed to slavery, came north and settled in the valley of the Wabash in Indiana. He was killed not long after at a house-raising and left his widow, a very superior woman, in that new country with a large family of chil-dren, of whom the second son, Alexander, became the father of the subject of this sketch. The mother was Delilah Polk, of the same general family as that of President Polk. She was of Kentucky birth and grew up amid the surroundings of Daniel Boone. Her father, Charles Polk, was born at Detroit, Michigan, whither his mother, made prisoner by the Indians in Kentucky, had been taken in midwinter, and his father did not see the boy until ha was about two years old. Then the mother bore him on horseback back to Kentucky. Those were heroic days and produced heroic men and women; though not more heroic than these days of ours where conditions exist like those of that time. Not more than twenty-five years ago, I was with a party which rode in the bitterest of winter weather from the Rosebud Agency to Fort Sully, in South Dakota, and one of that party was an Indian woman who rode on horseback with the rest, having her fiveyear-old daughter strapped in her blanket upon her back. Often the child cried from the cold, and every member of the party suffered from frost, but the mother never made complaint. There are heroic men and women in these days. The Blackburns and the Polks were thrifty and well-to-do, and belonged to the better educated class of farmers and business men. Alexander Blackburn and Delilah, his wife, bravely attacked the rugged conditions of pioneer life incident to building tip a home and fortune for themselves and their children. They moved from the Wabash Valley when the eldest son, William Maxwell, was four years of age, going with an ox team a distance of two hundred and fifty miles into northern Indiana and making their home near La Porte. Probably but few of the incidents of that journey were permanently remembered by the boy, but the impressions made upon him could not easily be effaced. There was the long and slow Tourney; the encampment at night by stream and near rich meadows where the tired oxen grazed; the restful play at evening about the camp fire with the little brother. two years younger, who doubtless cried often and often was left

to cry, because mother was busy with the evening meal; then there were the rivers to cross and a part of the way a new country to traverse, while there were roads to cut through thick timber and other difficulties to overcome and trails to meet before they reached the rich prairie land known as Rolling Prairie in "the edge of some of the finest timber that ever grew." There they made their new home. Strong of character by inheritance, the circumstances of early pioneer life developed additional strength. And to this there was added the life-giving spirit of a true re-ligious experience, so that in this pioneer home was ever a glad, joyous household. It was a good place for a boy to grow to vounge manhood. One writer has fitly characterized this home as "cheerfully religious," the words "cheerfully religious" being used with intention, for he goes on to say, "I was never in a home where the religious life was so prominent and yet never saw a more joyful home," and in the games of youth the "father and mother romped with all the enthusiasm of the youngest." It was here, in walks with his parents, that the future doctor of divinity and enthusiastic student of geology early learned to love the study of nature. His ready wit and sturdy character, so marked in later life, grew naturally, as does a plant in rich, well watered and carefully tended soil. There was nothing left to chance, and yet it is also true that but few boys needed less of supervision and guidance. His body grew healthy and robust in the life of a farmer's boy. The farm in those (lays was in a wheat growing region. The sickle gave place to the cradle and this to the famous McCormick reaper, one of the first three, it is said, manufactured by Cyrus McCormick. In the sowing and the reaping and then in threshing the grain, at first with an oldfashioned flail, and in marketing the result at Michigan City or New Buffalo, on the lake twelve miles away, the boy did his full share.

It is probable that he attended school when opportunity offered, but undoubtedly his earlier study of books was at home under the direction of his parents. His father is spoken of as a remarkably well educated man and a great reader, and as having taught school as occasion demanded. That Dr. Blackburn did not lack for early advantages is evidenced by the fact that at seventeen years of age he began to fit for college, and that he

graduated with honors shortly after reaching manhood's estate. At college he was a hard-working student, a ready debater, and early evidenced the clear logic and mental grasp of later days. After graduation a year was spent in teaching school, a winter term at La Porte and a summer term at Constantine, Indiana. His professional studies occupied the following three years, and we find him ordained as an evangelist and preaching at Three Rivers, Michigan, before reaching the age of twenty-five. Shortly before ordination he was married to Miss Elizabeth Powell, who, after treading life's journey fifty-five years with him, survived her husband but a few months, (lying March 7, 1899).

The young preacher was always a student; he studied men and books and soon began to write. In his early pastorates his efforts at authorship were largely biographical and show the trend of his study: and out of these studies-or were they but an indication of the larger selection already made-the study of church history came to have for him attractions, and this became his chosen field.

In 1862 he spent some months in travel and study in the mother country. He also went to the continent and was in France, Spain, Switzerland and the Netherlands, where he devoted himself to careful study of the causes and events of the Reformation, that he might the more correctly interpret the far-reaching results of that religious upheaval. On his return there was published, during a pastorate of four years at Trenton, New Jersey, other biographical studies-lives of John Calvin, Ulric Zwingli, William Farrel, Aonio Palario, the „regt Swiss reformer, and a history of the Huguenots under the title "Coligny and the Huguenots," in two volumes; all of which appeared in rapid succession. When it is remembered that to the exacting responsibilities of a city church were also added the absorbing study of history in the life of the Christian church and the growth of doctrine, one is astonished at the amount of work accomplished. It is only when a powerful mind works effectively and without waste that such results appear. A partial list of the product of Dr. Blackburn's pen gives thirty-three titles to hi; credit. While still a pastor at Trenton he was offered the presidency of his alma mater. This he declined, though fully appreciating the honor of the call. It was rather as a student of

church history than in general administrative ability that he felt his power. In June, 1868, he was elected to the vacant professorship of ecclesiastical and church history in the Presbyterian Theological Seminary at Chicago. He entered upon the duties of the chair at once, and threw himself with all the zeal and the training of years of special study into meeting the needs of the position. The place had found the man and the man had found his place. 'It was as when a machine complete, made for a specific purpose and perfectly adjusted, falls into the steady stroke and regular beat of the accomplishment of that for which it was made. Dr. Blackburn enjoyed his work and worked with all his might. The amount of work he accomplished at this time is marvelous. Occupying the chair of a most important professorship, he assisted in making good vacancies in other chairs, supplied one or other of the city churches, delivered ecclesiastical and historical lectures outside, and made frequent contributions to periodicals and reviews, and made a steady advance in the preparation of his historical works. His "History of the Christian Church" was published about the time of his withdrawal from the seminary. It is well understood that this resignation was one of the attendant results of the David Swing heresy trial. Dr. Blackburn did not hold to Professor Swing's views, but defended the man in his right to hold these without being branded as a heretic. No one now remembers this trial—we do not know what it was about and wonder what was gained by it. Though Professor Swing was acquitted, he was virtually driven out, and the spirit of intolerance prevailed. With this Dr. Blackburn was not in sympathy, and resigned. Death came and further weakened the faculty, and it was years before the seminary could recover. Long before this Dr. Blackburn's reputation as an author and an authority in his chosen field had been settled. Not only in this country, but in Europe as well, his name was favorably known. A British review of the history of the Huguenots says: "In this work the author has gone to many fountain-heads and set them before the reader in all the distinctiveness of a dramatic picture. If there had been no authentic work on this most interesting subject written on this side of the Atlantic, here is one by an American author that admirably fills the needs," and of his "History of the Christian Church," one of our foremost American

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reviews says : "Our own country has produced but few ecclesiastical historians of note; Dr. Philip Schaff and Dr. William At, Blackburn are the best. The volume of Dr. Blackburn's now before us is the most creditable general history of the Christian church that has appeared on this side of the Atlantic. Dr. Schaff has as yet covered only a part of the ground. The author is a professor of church history and a well-known lecturer and writer of learning and ability. His researches in general and ecclesiastical history have been widely extended, and his study of Christian doctrine has been thorough. His style is lucid, direct and forcible. His method is much better than that of the old German authors, not being encumbered with endless divisions and subdivisions, yet following a definite outline with a sufficiently minute analysis. The chapter on religious denominations is of peculiar value. We discover a spirit of fairness and candor which will doubtless secure for the work a wide acceptance among Christians of various names. The author is not unwilling to acknowledge the mistakes of those Christians with whom he would most naturally sympathize, and the virtue of those with whom he is known to differ in important respects. On the whole the history is a fine specimen of condensed, yet spritely historical writing. The work ought to have a place, not only in the theological seminaries and ministers' libraries, but in the families of intelligent Christians of all denominations."

European comment is no less favorable in the tone and spirit with which the author is regarded.

It was expected that the historical study of the church would be followed by a companion volume on the "History of Christian Doctrine." Upon this work had been spent years of study and research, and the manuscript was nearly completed and ready for the printer when this and other valuable notes were destroyed by fire. Such a loss cannot be recovered and the work was not re-written.

On withdrawal from the Chicago professorship, Dr. Blackburn was selected to be chancellor of the Western University at Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, which position he declined. A few years were spent in the pastorate at Cincinnati, when failure in the doctor's hitherto robust health and that of others of the family, brought them to North Dakota for a summer in the

Devil's Lake region. Quite unexpectedly to him, the University of North Dakota offered him the presidency. He accepted with many doubts and was entirely satisfied to continue the connection but one year. There was too much of politics in a position in a state institution to suit the doctor's make-up,

However, lie did not choose to return to the older homes and cities from whence lie had come-. The wine of life and the breezes of the prairies had found way into his blood, and the doctor longed to take part in the work of empire building by making men of character in this newer land. He was called in 1885 to be president of the Presbyterian Synodical College of South Dakota at Pierre.

Until now the most of us had not known Dr. Blackburn. His stocky figure, strong face and active movements drew attention at once, and men beheld with a gasp the reckless dash with which the doctor, with hat well back on his head and sitting firmly in his two-wheeled cart, sent the half-wild pony through the streets. lie became a familiar figure, and we came to love him, though it is doubtful if many fully appreciated him. He was never idle; work was the dominant note in his life. The Habit of life had long been fixed and he could not have changed it if he would, and would not if lie could, and the new college in a new region afforded ample field. It was the work of laying foundations, and the doctor strove to lay these deeply-and well. Conscious of his own strength, of the great opportunity, and confident of hearty support by his associates in the churches and ministry of his order, nothing discouraged him-the work of the mas ter builder was joy to him and inspiration to beholders.

It is to be regretted that, as seen from the outside, Dr. Blackburn's efforts in behalf of education at this outpost (lid not receive the loyal support they deserved. Hard times came and the new country did not develop according to plans laid in dreamland. Local jealousies, growing out of the bitter war waged upon Pierre by other aspirants for the capital, alienated some from the support of their college. To Dr. Blackburn there fell the greater burden. With a scanty corps of instructors, he was left almost unaided to secure pupils, and to some extent provide the necessary funds. Had he been a younger man, and had lie been a college president of the modern type, it is alto-

gether possible that the institution would have weathered the period of stress and difficulty. But Dr. Blackburn was not of the modern type of college president—he was not a money-getter, and did not take kindly to this feature. Nor would he run into debt, and the result was that when funds were not forthcoming the doctor paid bills out of his own pocket, and when the pocket was empty did without, rather than incur indebtedness.

Dr. Blackburn was pre-eminently a teacher, and as such was remarkably successful. Whether in class or as a lecturer, or in the pulpit, he had the ability of a master. You could not talk with him on the street corner without learning something from him. He taught without effort—he simply could not help himself, for he was a born teacher. It is a pity that such men are obliged to attempt anything other than the chosen work of their high calling. With much the same power as that of Hark Hopkins did Dr. Blackburn teach men. If President Hopkins, sitting on a log with a student by his side, stood for a fully equipped college, the same might be said of President Blackburn and his student seated together on a boulder here in South Dakota.

In June, 1898, the college was removed from Pierre to Huron. Dr. Blackburn resigned from the presidency, was chosen president-emeritus and to give instruction in psychology and geology, and attended to the duties of his position through the first term of the college year. His death was sudden and painless and took place at his home in the city of Pierre. His body rests in the cemetery overlooking the city and the river beyond, while the ideals for which he strove, the purposes for which he lived and the men into whom he built of his own lofty character remain, our rich inheritance from one most worthy, who has gone before,

This brief sketch has followed the course of only the larger events of Dr. Blackburn's life. It has not attempted to show in any adequate degree his life's abiding influence for good in this world's betterment, nor was it attempted as other than a sketch. Any just analysis of his life and the work accomplished would require much more time than the limits of this paper allow. A few sentences should be written giving in brief the estimate of men who knew him well as a writer, a preacher and a lecturer, and as a man whom to know was a joy and an inspiration.

As an author Dr. Blackburn made for himself an interna



Hon. Geo. H. Hand

happy, and some one has said that his later sermons were running commentaries on the Scriptures.

A Calvinist by inheritance and training, he was broadly liberal in his recognition of the good in other systems. He would defend his own lines of faith, but never was intolerant of others. His youngest brother is a well known and widely honored clergyman of the Baptist denomination, and the two have always been one in sympathy and desire for the success of the other. When Dr. Blackburn chose to talk doctrinal theology he was fully able to hold his own. He would not, however, allow any one to force a profitless discussion-too much like threshing over old straw. The story is told of a persistent effort to bring tilt doctor out on the dogma of infant damnation. Again and again was reference made to bring argument. "You Presbyterians believe that infants (lying unregenerate are lost and eternally damned, don't you, now?" was the final attack. The doctor fairly lost his patience, and replied, "Well, suppose we do believe in infant damnation; suppose we do; it does not hurt the infant at all!"

It was not till after coming to South Dakota that Dr. Blackburn devoted himself especially to geological studies. The so called Bad Lands had great attractions, and he made repeater visits to them, bringing strange casts and shapes of former life back with him. On such an expedition the doctor was a boy, again. He wore his oldest clothing and had but little in appearance to recommend him. At one time, when on one of these expeditions, the party drifted into the mining regions of the Black Hills, and here was an opportunity to visit one of the deeper gold mines. This could not be neglected, and application was made to the superintendent, stating who the applicant was and his interest in science as additional reason for the favor desired. Now the doctor was in traveling attire and had been out in the wild for some weeks, and there was doubtless ample justification for the incredulous refusal of permission to visit the mines. "Yo Dr. Blackburn! You president of Pierre University! Na much! Why, Dr. Blackburn's a gentleman, lie is!" Had the superintendent heard Dr. Blackburn preach the Sunday following he would have obtained truer knowledge of his identity notwithstanding the clothes worn by him.

The earlier existence of our State Historical Society had inception in 1890. The first steps for public recognition were taken at a general meeting called for that purpose February 20, 1890, presided over by that grand and rather peculiar old hero, Rev. Edward Brown. Several meetings were held for perfecting the organization, resulting in the selection of permanent officers Hon. George H. Hand as president, and Hon. O. H. Parker as secretary. It was not, however, till February 18, 1891, that the society was finally incorporated, and February 20, 1891, Dr. Blackburn was chosen to be permanent secretary. Of historical value, as probably the last specimen of the handwriting of Mr. Hand in the interest of the Historical Society, is a slip of paper now loose in the records, giving the fact of Dr. Blackburn's election as the matter of business attended to by the board and signed Geo. H. Hand, president. This slip has further an endorsement by Dr. Blackburn, stating the fact above mentioned relative to Mr. Hand's handwriting. President Hand died soon after, and though a general interest was kept up by individuals, the society, as such, fell into the domain of the future. Dr. Blackburn once grimly remarked that he hoped his election as secretary had not brought on the death of the original society! He quietly devoted himself to the collection and care of such objects of historical value as came in his way, and waited for the renewal of life which would surely come.

Dr. Blackburn was always interested in everything pertaining to the real advancement of the state and the community in which he lived. He was, moreover, keenly alive to the demand made upon him as a citizen for the public good. State and city politics, in the broader sense of the term, claimed his thought and effort. He was a wide reader. On all national questions he kept himself well posted, and international issues were fresh and living topics when he talked upon them. His life as a man and with other men was manly and robust. His thinking was never lacking in strength. He had a message to men, whether it were of life eternal or the open secrets of nature. This gave him power, for he lived up to the doctrine he taught. He had no patience with form for form's sake, and could not endure shams, nor could he abide fraud and deception. Absolutely fearless in support of truth as he saw it and always ready and eager to learn,

Dr. Blackburn never grew old. The eternal springs of youth were his. There was no such thing as "dry rot" in either head or heart.

At the appointed time the body failed and was laid to rest. The man still lives—he lives in the work he did, the character he helped build, and in the remembrance of men. Such men, truly live, and live forever.

-Thomas Lawrence Riggs.

Oahe, South Dakota, August, 1902.

EDITOR'S PREFACE

This "History of Dakota" by the late Dr. William W. Blackburn was written during the year 1892. In scope it is evidently what the author intended it to be, a mere outline history of events from the earliest time down to that date. In pursuing the delicate task of editing his work, I found myself in possession of none but a type-written copy of the author's text, which had never come under his critical and practiced eye for correction. Some errors were allowed to creep into it, and omissions were made which, without doubt, would have been remedied had the copy come under his observation.

It is not for me to say to what extent the supplementary editorial notes add to the value and interest of the author's work. The excellence of the text is an ample excuse for their number and variety, and in a measure for their character and form. If they are numerous it is because the author attained to a full degree what he evidently purposed to produce, a skeleton, a lucid tracing of the history of Dakota, and to place a guide-post upon every historic promontory. Neither did the editor expect to attain in these explanatory notes a corresponding literary excellence to the body of the work. The reader will fail to find in them the pure and simple diction and the direct and finished style of the author. I may, however, indulge the hope that they are, in subject matter, of such kind and character as might have been supplied by the author himself, had he lived to enlarge his work.

In the preparation of these notes I have endeavored to glean from the most authoritative historical publications obtainable. I have also used such portions of a large correspondence as seemed to me to be of value. Much available information has been secured by private talks with active participants, the fron-

tiersmen, the men of Harney's time, of Sully's time and of Custer's time, not to forget those earlier Dakotans, the old trappers and fur gatherers, who clung to their first haunts after the con, dittoing which created their kind had vanished. A few of these human relics of a past epoch, though old and infirm, still live within our borders. I have found it necessary in a few instances to question the authenticity of seemingly well established facts and dates; as, for example, the date, 1780, which I believe has been generally accepted as the time when the first settlement was made in Dakota at Pembina; as also the name of the first continuous white resident and the date of the commencement of his residence. I have endeavored in such cases, though at the expense of some repetition in the different notes, to bring out sufficient collateral evidence on points of fact.

When a considerable portion of the information upon the subject matter of any topic covered by a note has been procured from the same source, the authority has been cited and due credit given to the author, but when such information has been obtained from many and varied sources no citation has been made.

The editor has not expected that these notes will make a full and finished history of the author's text. Future study of our history will doubtless reveal many flaws and mistakes, and suggest many alterations and corrections in the work done. There is certainly room for large additions to it. It will be an ample compensation to me, however, if the effort made will stimulate some one who has more time and a greater opportunity to gather and put in form the rich historical harvest we possess.

Finally, I wish to extend grateful acknowledgment to those who so kindly responded to inquiries made by me regarding subjects treated of in my work. I hereby extend sincere appreciation to Major Charles P. Jordan of Rosebud Agency, S. D. Louis LaPlant, Basil Clement, Van Meter, Ben Arnold and other old residents, yet living, and to the memory of many others (lead, whom I have consulted from time to time and to whom I am indebted for many facts and collateral evidence).

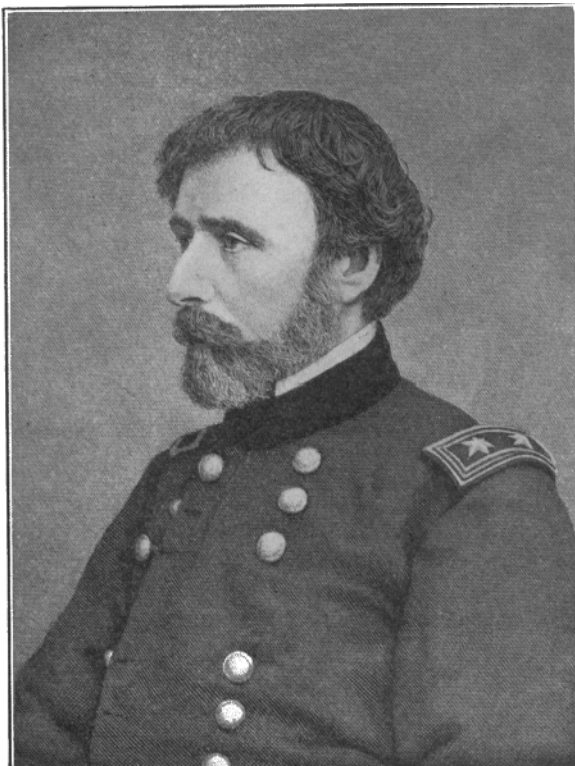
I am also particularly indebted to Mr. J. W. Cheney, librarian of the war department library, Washington, D. C., for his generous aid; to Thomas L. Riggs, president of the society, for

valuable suggestions, and to Mr. Doane Robinson, secretary of the society, for much varied and patient assistance and judicious and indispensable advice, and to Mr. William J. Hovey of Fort Pierre.

And since the foregoing was written I have been placed under deep obligations to Rev. Martin Kenel of Fort Yates, North Dakota, for extensive contributions of information relating to Gall and John Grass.

-DeLorme W. Robinson.

Pierre, S. D.



Gen. John C. Fremont



Father Peter John DeSmet, S. J.